



# Maine Sheriffs' Association

*"One Team, One Mission"*

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March 20, 2023

## **L.D. 439 – An Act to Allow Death by Suicide to Be Considered a Death While in the Line of Duty**

Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety, my name is Robert Young. I am the Sheriff of Piscataquis County and here on behalf of the Maine Sheriffs Association.

Maine sheriffs discussed this bill and those present voted to support L.D. 439 – An Act to Allow Death by Suicide to Be Considered a Death While in the Line of Duty.

The subject matter of this bill is very difficult to discuss, and Maine Sheriffs wish to thank Representative Salisbury for bringing this important yet sensitive topic forward. While evaluating the scenario presented in this bill, the predominant response noted was that while none of the sheriffs can imagine navigating such a profound loss within our agencies, we must take a position in the horrific event that our worst fears are realized.

As we grappled with how to present our support and stories were shared, the enormity of what law enforcement is tasked with confronting on a daily basis cannot be understated. Each and every day, law enforcement officers are continually exposed to the negative human element. We are faced with highly charged emotional situations with the expectation that we'll deescalate and provide safety for those in the midst of trauma.

Jails are often referred to as the emergency rooms of the penal system. Our corrections officers have to manage individuals who often arrive in our jails under the influence of substances or suffering from mental health disorders. Being verbally harassed and smeared with inmate feces, while working extra shifts due to short-staffing, are not uncommon events in the average day of a corrections officer working within a county jail.

Research conducted by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reveals alarming statistics in overall mental health of law enforcement officers, with primary findings showing higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While efforts are underway to help law enforcement officers navigate the impact of their working conditions, passage of this bill sends the message that the State of Maine recognizes the toll this work takes on its dedicated law enforcement officers.

Maine sheriffs appreciate the opportunity to share our position of support for LD 439, and we urge each of you to vote Ought To Pass. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,  
Sheriff Robert Young  
O/B/O Maine Sheriffs' Association